



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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(Revised)

RELEASE OF DEATH CERTIFICATES

By: Kristin Sullivan, Chief Analyst

You asked for a summary of the state law governing the release of death certificates ([CGS § 7-51a](#)).

SUMMARY

Under [CGS § 7-51a](#), anyone age 18 or older may purchase a certified copy of a death certificate, or a certified copy of a fetal death certificate that is at least 100 years old, from (1) a registrar of vital statistics (i.e., town clerk) with custody of it or (2) the State Vital Records Office at the Department of Public Health (DPH). Members of genealogical societies authorized to do business in the state must have full access to all death certificates (but not social security numbers restricted under federal law) and may also purchase certified copies.

DPH may issue an uncertified copy of a death certificate, or an uncertified copy of a fetal death certificate that is at least 100 years old, to department-approved (1) researchers and (2) state and federal agencies.

However, the law restricts who has access to the decedent's Social Security number (SSN) and information contained in the death certificate's "administrative purposes" section (e.g., the decedent's race, educational level, and occupation).

The fee for each copy of a death certificate is \$20. But the law establishes a one-time waiver for immediate family members of a deceased veteran ([CGS § 7-74\(c\)](#)).

CERTIFIED VS. UNCERTIFIED COPIES

By law, a “certified copy” of a vital record, including a death certificate, has (1) all the information from the original that may be disclosed and (2) an attested signature and raised seal of the registrar of vital statistics authorized to issue it. An “uncertified copy” has all the information contained in the certified copy, other than the attested signature and raised seal.

Generally, a certified copy of a vital record may be used for legal purposes. Conversely, an uncertified copy is informational and cannot be used for such purposes.

RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO CERTAIN INFORMATION

[CGS § 7-51a](#) restricts access to the decedent’s SSN and personal information. Specifically, for deaths occurring after July 1, 1997, (1) only the surviving spouse, next of kin, and certain state or federal agencies can access the SSN and complete administrative purposes section and (2) a researcher requesting a certified copy can access the administrative purposes section, but with the decedent’s SSN redacted.

For deaths occurring after December 31, 2001, people listed on the death certificate (e.g., informant, funeral director, embalmer, conservator, surviving spouse, physician, and town clerk) may access the decedent’s SSN, as well as other information recorded in the administrative purposes section, but only to process the certificate.

According to DPH’s website, eligible parties must indicate on the application for a certified copy whether they are (1) the decedent’s spouse or next of kin and (2) requesting access to the SSN.

HYPERLINKS

DPH, State Vital Records Office – Death Certificates, <http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3132&q=390664>, last visited October 1, 2013.

KS:ts